

CEMEX UK

Transforming Our Meetings...To be the best! Guide For Effective Meetings



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Transforming our meetings – purpose of this guide

The aim of this guide is to provide our team in CEMEX UK with a common sense approach to running a meeting that works.

This guide should be used as a reference for those who are involved in delivering meetings, for those who attend as participants and for those who present updates.

Having a clear purpose for the meeting

When deciding to hold a meeting there are significant factors to take into consideration for example the cost of running a meeting can involve;

- Time (salary cost (hourly rate x no of hours) of each of the participants at the meeting
- Cost of travel to the meeting
- Refreshments – tea, coffee, water
- Lunch
- Accommodation
- Preparation (salary cost) by presenters
- Preparation (salary cost) by those preparing to run the meeting

When we consider how cost conscious CEMEX is as a company, it is an area in which none of us can afford to waste money or time for that matter.

In making your decision to hold a meeting, think about the impact of the cost and consider the alternatives.

Before you decide to hold a meeting ask yourself;

- Do I have the time to adequately prepare for the meeting?
- Do other participants have time to prepare themselves?
- Are all necessary participants available and willing to attend?

If you cannot answer 'yes' to all 3 of the above questions, then your meeting is likely to be ineffective.

The first and most important step in running a meeting that works, is knowing your purpose for the meeting. The way in which you formulate your purpose in calling the meeting is critical in helping you organise your thoughts.

Consider these examples;

“I’ve called you here today because we have not had a meeting for a while.”

This is wrong as it lacks purpose. However;

“I’ve gathered you here today because I need to know which projects each of you are working on, the progress you are making and the timeline for the implementation of each project”

This has a purpose – you know what you hope to accomplish in this meeting as you have made the purpose clear from the outset. Each of the participants now have a clear objective and will know what is expected of them at this meeting. This will help them to come prepared.

In formulating your purpose for a meeting, ask yourself ‘what do you want to accomplish?’

Deciding to hold a meeting - What do you want to accomplish?

The decision whether it is necessary to hold a meeting depends on a number of factors:

- Do you need to pass on information or collect it from other people?
- Do you need to resolve a business issue or a difference of opinion?
- Do you need a majority decision or evaluation on an issue?
- Do you want to generate a sense of team spirit?
- Do you want to be sure that your team understands the nature of the next project?
- Do you want to provide training on a new initiative?
- Do you need an immediate response to a problem?
- Do you want to convince a client or customer to use your services?

Avoid regular meetings if you do not have a purpose and you cannot justify asking the participants to sacrifice their time to make the meeting – ask yourself about the purpose – do the participants really need to be there?

Think about the purpose of the meeting and whom should you invite – think about your agenda and invite only those that need to be there - consider their time and assess whether they need to be present for all or part of the meeting. Think about whether you could ask for comments by email or by Shift? Could you have a ring around?

When do you decide to hold a meeting?

- The interaction of opinions is necessary to create an idea, plan or project
- Group dynamics are essential to the accomplishment of the purpose
- Meetings are valuable tools for generating team spirit
- Time restrictions limit other options e.g. meetings are necessary in a situation which requires group consensus
- The subject is complex as to require interaction and explanation

When should the meeting be scheduled?

- Allow enough time for you and your meeting participants to prepare - when timing your meeting, work backwards from the date of the meeting
- Confirm attendance before the meeting to ensure all can attend who need to attend
- Try to avoid scheduling a meeting at key holiday times such as school holidays, around bank holidays and if there are regular meetings, aim to cease these during the summer and Christmas periods
- Try to avoid scheduling meetings at beginning or end of the week – this is a time when we are handling most business matters – either by preparing for the week ahead or concluding the week just gone
- Morning meetings are more productive than those scheduled late in the day
- Don't mix business with pleasure – attention to serious matters becomes diluted when attempting to combine a meeting with lunch or dinner - If you must use two rooms use: one for dinner and one for the meeting

Where should I hold the meeting?

- Aim to select a location convenient for those who need to attend & check availability before sending out invites.
- Ensure there are adequate facilities
 - Laptop projector available – and working (good practice to ask another participant to bring a back up in case of equipment failure)
 - Layout of room to aid discussions
 - Size of room to accommodate the number of participants
 - confirm refreshments & lunch arrangements & timings for these
 - car parking facilities

How long should the meeting last?

The meeting should last as long as it takes to accomplish its purpose.

One session should not last more than one hour

- Encourage presenters to find ways to generate discussions with participants, to help to maintain the attention of the audience (average attention span is 20 minutes)
- Ensure that there are adequate rest breaks throughout the meeting to help concentration and energy levels (encourage participants to stand and stretch!)
- Refreshments in the room can also help to keep participants focused.

What information is required by participants in order to ensure valuable contribution?

The key to a successful meeting lies in the preparation of the chair and the participants – this sets the tone of your meeting, long before the first agenda item is discussed.

What is essential when preparing participants at a meeting is providing them with the information they need in order to make a valuable contribution.

- Inform them of the purpose of the meeting as well as the subject
- If there is more than one subject to be discussed outline the agenda of the meeting
- Inform them about what is expected



- be prepared to offer ideas about how we sell the new system
- be prepared to report on the status of your project
- Inform them of the location of the meeting, the participants, the duration of the meeting and the time allocated to their session

There are three things you should remember when providing the participants with the information they need to prepare themselves;

1. Plenty of time for preparation – the more you expect from your participants, the more time they should have to prepare
2. This should all be put to them in writing
3. You should confirm that they have fully understood their objective by asking that they respond with a draft agenda for the session

Four Steps to an effective discussion at a meeting

George Kieffer author of “The Strategy of Meetings” defines the winning meeting as one in which the leader takes charge of responsibility for the proceedings.

The role of the leader in the meeting is to;

1. Ensure that all of the information is prepared – the agenda and information relating to each item of the agenda
2. That the information to be discussed has questions prepared to prompt discussions
3. Ensure that a decision is made as a result of those discussions
4. Action is agreed and recorded with timescales

Distribute the agenda before the meeting date to allow individuals to prepare

- The agenda should list items in order of priority – for CEMEX
 1. Health & Safety is always the first item of every agenda
 2. Customer Focus is the second item
- There should also be space on the agenda for meeting participants to be able to add items

- Consider your seating plan carefully:
 - Chair layout
 - Ideally a round table to encourage discussion
 - Rectangular meetings can re-enforce dominating personalities – as they tend to sit at either end of the table

Chairing the meeting

Meeting attendance is an excellent indicator of the way people view the importance of other's time. When chairing a meeting the leader should ensure that the meeting commences and concludes on time. When you delay starting a meeting for stragglers, you are penalising those who came on time and reward those who did not.

Do not disrupt the meeting to accommodate latecomers by giving a re-cap on topics that have already been discussed.

- First of all ensure participants are aware of the Health & Safety matters relating to the venue of the meeting – fire evacuation procedures, local H&S procedures
- If there are new members to the meeting ensure that the name and position of all participants are announced
- Establish the rules of the meeting;
 - Start time
 - End time
 - Break times
 - Lunch arrangements
 - Use of mobile phones, blackberrys and laptops during the meeting
 - Agenda items for discussion and allocated timings
- The chair is responsible for keeping the meeting discussions moving forward and to the allocated timing. Consider asking a meeting participant to serve as a timekeeper – it will be that person's responsibility to inform the rest of the group the amount of time remaining for discussion.
- You are the chair and it's enough to say politely "it's time we moved on; if we have time we'll return to the subject later"
- Be prepared with questions in advance – a list of questions to which you need answers to from those presenting

- Keeping all discussions relevant to the topic –this is not an easy task to do but in the interests of productivity – if someone strays from the subject a reminder could be;
“Could you relate what you’ve said to the situation in particular?”
“In the interests of time, I think that we had better get back to the subject in hand”
- Summarise the discussions at the end of each session – this helps participants organise their thoughts
 - Confirming the conclusions, next steps and actions required
- At the end of a discussion – where ensure consensus of opinion is needed – seek this
 - “Are we all in agreement?”
- Review the tasks/actions were given so that everyone is clear of the deadline

Encouraging participation throughout the meeting & managing time

A good meeting involves interaction among the chair and the participants. A key responsibility of the meeting chair is to foster an atmosphere, to ensure that participants feel encouraged to contribute opinions, ideas and feedback. The chair should;

- Ensure that time is built into the agenda to allow for such discussions.
- Try to avoid cutting short productive discussion and if time becomes a factor, agree to table the discussion and resolve to re-visit at a follow-up meeting
- Be positive – during meetings ideas are being shared and opinions are being shaped and challenged, and new approaches to solving problems are being proposed. In doing all of this, it is essential to keep the discussions positive, otherwise there is a risk that participants will not want to contribute for fear of being ‘shot down’.
- In voicing disagreement, be careful not to dismiss others’ contributions because they may not be in line with your own way of thinking. Rather than dwell on problems and challenges, encourage the participants to offer creative solutions.
- Help others to express themselves effectively by seeking clarification where necessary i.e.
“Could you summarise that point for me?”
- Encourage, not discourage and avoid embarrassing the participant

- Avoid editorialising – as meeting leader you are entitled to your opinions, however, try to keep opinions out of discussion
- Offer colleagues the same courtesies you expect from them
 - eye contact
 - do not interrupt when they are speaking
 - hold all telephone calls
 - do not leave the room unless you are to announce a break
 - you do not do other work whilst the meeting is in progress (e.g. look at your Blackberry or laptop)
- Keep the discussions balanced
 - as a meeting leader you face the task of seeing both sides of the story
 - your role is to mediate and consider all viewpoints
- Listen, listen, listen – we are a nation of non-listeners;
 - Dr Steil quoted in one US magazine “American Salesman” as saying that 80% of waking hours is spent in communication with only 45% of that time is listening.
 - Encourage listening by asking participants to think of questions for discussion
 - Ask presenters to consider how to engage with the group during their sessions to encourage participation

Etiquette for attendees to meetings

Be punctual – the meeting chair should not disrupt the flow of the meeting to accommodate latecomers by giving a re-cap of topics that have already been discussed. As an attendee to the meeting you should make a concerted effort to be on time. Aim to arrive at least 15 minutes prior to your session and find out beforehand whether you can enter the meeting at that point or at the time that they are ready for you to present your update.

Be prepared – come prepared to make a meaningful contribution to the discussions. Thoroughly review all materials provided in advance of the meeting, including the agenda and supplementary background reading materials. Prepare a list of questions, comments you will make and ideas you want to share. Always bring something to write with and some paper to take notes.

Be participatory – Exercise your active listening skills, using non-verbal communication to demonstrate that you are listening via posture and eye contact. When appropriate ask questions

and offer suggestions. When participating in the discussion be succinct in your comments and keep them relevant to the topic.

Be polite – Turn off electronic communications devices. Side conversations should not take place. If you have to leave early, sit near to the exit so as to create minimal disruption. A polite attendee will give their undivided attention to the speaker who has the floor and will wait for the most appropriate time to offer a contribution and will not try to monopolize the discussions.

Materials – reinforcement not a distraction

Care is needed when using any kind of documentation or materials in a meeting – it should be used to provide necessary information, clarify a discussion or reinforce a point.

Materials should not disrupt the flow of the discussions.

- Allow plenty of time for the preparation of information required for a meeting
- If thorough reading is required – distribute the document before the meeting date and summarise its contents at the meeting
- “Walking” the group through a report is ineffective and often irritating to participants
- Use of diagrams/photos are very effective at emphasising a point being made
- Use a laptop projector to minimise use of printed materials
- Where possible distribute any documents after the meeting to avoid distraction
- As meeting leader, maintain control of what materials will be handed out:
 - ensure participants discuss with your self what materials will be issued
 - allows you to eliminate any materials that are counterproductive to your goals

Hints & tips for presenters attending meetings

It is important to think about your objective when presenting at a meeting – ask yourself ‘What is the purpose of my presentation and what do I need to achieve?’

Think about the following;



- Are you there to inspire? Educate? Enlighten? Change perspective?
- Who are my audience and what do they need from me? Try to answer the question ‘What’s in it for them?’
- What do I need to say, how much information do I need to give?
- How do I construct my message?
- How do I most effectively deliver the information?
- *What do I want my audience..*
 - *to think.....*
 - *to feel*
 - *to do.....*

.....after they have listened to me?”
- What is my take home message?
- *“A picture is worth a thousand words”*
- The average person remembers 70% of a ‘verbal’ presentation 3 hours later & 10% of it 3 days later
- For a visual presentation 85% is remembered 3 hours later & 20% 3 days later
- Talk to your audience not to your visuals
- Your audience is there to listen to you, not to read from a screen
- When you stand in front of an audience you have approximately 5 seconds to get their attention
- You then have 30 seconds to develop interest & curiosity
- How you open is critical to the success of your presentation
- Posture, eye contact, conveying enthusiasm for your message
- Try to involve your audience through an effective Q&A

Finally, determine how long your presentation will be and request this time for your update prior to the meeting. It is important that you also build in appropriate time for questions and discussions. Do not overrun –the impact of doing this can have a severe knock on effect for each item on the meeting agenda.

Preparing to conclude the Meeting

When concluding a meeting, there are is a 3 step process which should be followed;

1. Prepare to conclude the meeting – this gives participants time to mentally organise their thoughts and allows them to start thinking about the next stage & actions they need to take
2. Summarise the findings and decisions by;
 - Repeating the purpose of the meeting
 - Summarising what has been discussed – to aid memory retention of the participants
 - The decisions made

- Actions which need to be taken
 - Who will take those actions
 - When the work has to be completed
3. Expressing appreciation – in concluding the meeting ensure that you thank the participants for their contribution to the meeting. Also thanking those who have prepared and completed work for the meeting.

Always allow time for 'Any Other Business' – this is important for those participants who may need to also discuss a matter important to them.

If there are only few 'AOBs' raised then conclude the meeting early – better to under run than overrun.

If the meeting is over running, it is best practice to review the agenda and prioritise items for discussion to the next meeting or to arrange a teleconference if these discussions cannot wait.

- You can ask your participants if they are able to continue beyond the meeting time – however be mindful of those who have far to travel

Taking a record of actions arising – minutes, action logs

After a meeting, it is important that actions agreed are implemented and on time, otherwise the meeting can be proven to be unproductive. However the taking of minutes should not stop the meeting participant from taking note of actions required.

Minutes and action logs provide;

- A prompt to take action – reminding those of tasks to be undertaken with timescales and deadlines
- A link to follow-up discussions and the next meeting
- A record of decisions made and action decided upon

Recorded actions should be;

- Accurate
- Objective
- Succinct – brief and easy to read otherwise they remain unread
- Understandable with minimal jargon or abbreviation
- Professional

Formats and content - attached to this guide is an example of a format for Minutes and for an Action Log, however basic content should include;

- Date of meeting and venue
- Attendance & apologies
- Minutes of last meeting
- Matters arising/Items discussed
 - Facts
 - Decisions
 - 'It was agreed that...'
- Date of next meeting
- Venue
- Timings

Once minutes have been prepared, identify who they need to be circulated to and circulate these promptly

- People tend to wait on the minutes prior to taking actions (although they should be taking their own notes to record actions required of them!)
- Do this whilst discussions are fresh in your mind
- Creates the right impression

Meeting Action Log – Sample

Meeting date	Subject Area	Activity	Owner responsible for action	Deadline	Status



Minutes – Sample

Minutes Of Meeting

Held on (date) at (Location)

Present:

Name	Position
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Apologies:

Name	Position
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Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting of (date) were accepted as a true record with the below actions being confirmed;

1. Summary of discussions and action required from previous meeting.

Action: (name)

2. Matters arising.

Action: (name)

Summary for discussion and action required

Action: (name)

Any Other Business

Future Meeting Dates

The (date) was confirmed as the next meeting date, at (location) commencing at (time) and concluding at (time).

